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Speech at AMIC 7th annual conference

1998 MAY 22 BANGKOK

1. (introducing/greeting)

It is my great honor to speak about Mainichi Shimbun’s "Electric Newspaper" at this AMIC 7th annual conference, today.

I was newspaper reporter for 27 years and have been working on the electric media project for the past one year. I am amazing at the rapid rate of progress of Japan’s Multi Media and the phenomena seem to be multiplying each year.

With the rapid technological advances and maturing world of new communication means, how should news media provide information? News on paper alone will not be able to respond to today’s needs. To say it bluntly, newspaper companies will not be able to survive by providing news information only on papers.
These factors in Japan made us decide to study, develop and put to use the "electronic newspaper."

2. What is the Mainichi Newspaper?

I would like to give you a brief explanation of who we are.

Mainichi Shinbun Newspaper Company was founded in 1872. Last February marked our 125th anniversary. It is the oldest newspaper company in Japan. Current circulation is over 4 million.

We also publish weekly magazines such as "Sunday Mainichi" and "Economist" and newspapers for children, newspapers in English and one and only newspaper in the world for blind people in Braille. We also sponsor numerous cultural and sports events.

We traditionally believe in "Freedom" and "Challenge" and we encourage "receptive" news coverage, that is, seeing from the readers' standpoint. This attitude of the company has produced
various exclusive news coverage. We have received 15 awards in
the category of editing, which is the most awards given to one
newspaper company by the most respected Japan Newspaper
Association. We have also received 4 awards in the category of
technical merits.

I would like to point out that only one technical award was
given selected by Japan Newspaper Association and was awarded
to us for our “Electronic Newspaper” we developed. I will explain
further on the subject later. The award was for our technical
accomplishment and for the solution we provided to the future of
newspaper industry which concerns us all.

3. What is Electronic Newspaper?

Of course, electronic newspaper of Mainichi Shinbun did not
come about over night.

It started in 1986 when technological advancement in Multi-
Media World had just begun. We started to transmit news/information to net work of personal computer in Japan. At the same time, we started to supply our news text using CATV telephone lines and on to outdoor electric newsboard set up on streets.

With these experience, we participated in the project in April of 1994 called “Multi-Media Joint Usage Experiment” which was initiated by NTT, the largest telecommunication company in Japan. We began developing “Electronic Newspaper” then.

After various experiment, we encountered the first business opportunity. That was the “Mainichi Zaurus Electronic Newspaper” using personal information terminal unit called “Zaurus”.

“Zaurus” is the Japan’s typical PDA(Personal Digital Assistance) developed by Sharp Company. It has limited screen space compared to personal computers, and the transmission speed at that time was 2400 bps.
(bit per second) which could not be considered fast. But the unit weighs only 200 g (about 1 lb) and fits in a jacket’s inside pocket.

News information are condensed into 150 letters so that people can read on Zaurus screen. Condensed news are transmitted to the computer of Nifty Company which has the largest network and people who has Zaurus downloaded news using telephone lines whenever and wherever they wanted to read.

*Zaurus Demonstration*

(He uses his computer with Power Point and explains about it, then provides the audience.

(1) There are 19 categories for contents:

(2) "Hot News" is sent as it happens, but for the other categories, 10 articles are selected in accordance with the importance and they are revised twice daily at 5 a.m. and at 5 p.m.

(3) Column articles are complete but contents of "Multi-media", "Corporate news", and others are created just for Electronic Newspapers.

(4) Users can download news before they leave home in the morning and they can read them on their way to work or school on their bus, train and so on.

And users can access even in streets, using ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Net Work) pay phones and cellular telephone.

(5) Charge per month is 500 yen plus telephone charge and provider’s connection charge.
Our "Mainichi Zaurus Electronic Newspaper" began its services in April of 1996, and it became the focus of attention not only in Japan but overseas. Associated Press, Financial Times in England and other press came to interview us one after another.

By the way, our Electronic Newspaper was introduced to public at the Newspaper Production Equipment Trade Show in November of 1995 and was considered practical. Following the public demonstration at the show, our company started to receive numerous business offers to commercialize Full Text Electronic Newspaper.

The first company who approached us was Just System, a company which develops and sells Japanese word processing software as well as being a network provider. We started to experiment in July of 1996 and began our services with charge in November.
* Full-Text Type Electronic Daily

(1) This is the basic pattern of the "Full Text Electronic Newspaper". News Screen in the middle lists categories such as "Hot News", "General", "Politics", "Economy" "International" "Local News" "Sports" "Personnel and Obituaries" "Column" "News from Home" with regional news.

We produce 150 "Hot News" daily and 20 daily for other categories such as Politics and Economy.

(2) If you click "Business A La Carte" on the left side of the screen, you can get to "Personal Computer Magazine Information" with articles on computers from computer magazines, or "Multi Media Information" with articles with newest information about internet. Also you can read about new products of companies and new technologies.
(3) "Culture A La Carte" on the left side of the screen will enable you to find out about "Weather", "Fortune-Telling" with your fortune of the day, "Lottery" with winning numbers, "Movies" "Theater" "Horse Race" "Education" "Health/ Medicine" "Children's News" and so on.

"Business A La Carte" and Culture A La Carte" contain 15 articles each. There are total 25 categories on 3 screens.

(4) It should be noted that, although we send the same articles and photographs, each provider can change size, location, layout and others very easily that each "electronic newspaper" looks different.

(5) So called "Personalized News" is becoming popular. Subscribers can pick out what they are interested from enormous amount of news information. They simply enter category of their interest and keyword.
(6) Basically, we transmit twice a day one at 5 a.m. and the other at 5 p.m. However, in the case of major disaster, accident or incident, we can issue the first edition, second, third, and so on by simply adding information or revise information. For example, on the day when the incident at the Japanese Ambassador’s Resident in Peru ended, we revised nine times just for evening edition.

(7) Users can search for past articles and use as data base.

(8) The charge for this “Full Text Type Electronic Newspaper” is 970 yen per month which is approx. $9.

Then, we established “Mail Type Electronic Newspaper” in August of 1996, which can be described as “courier service of news information.”
* Mail Type Electronic Daily


(2) We send all the subscribers “Mainichi Daily Mail Internet” in the evening, using internet and news information of two categories out of “Mainichi Daily Mail News” of subscriber’s choice, twice a day, one at 5 a.m. and another at 5 p.m.

(3) The charge is 8000 yen (about $80) for 6 months.

(4) Starting June of 1997, we began sending news related to computer called “Mainichi Daily Mail Computing” free of charge.
We named the Electronic Newspaper of Mainichi Shinbun, "Mainichi Daily Click".

For these technological know-hows and achievements, we received the award I mentioned before.

4. Electronic Newspaper/Explanation

As I explained, "Mainichi Daily Click" has "150 letter type", "Full Text type" and "Mail Type", because we envisioned the Electronic Newspaper would be read on computer, PDA (Personal Digital Assistants) or Television at the offset of the project.

Thus, even with various different types of terminal units makers may develop, with technological advancement or meeting with infrastructure, we don't need to develop different method to edit news and the efficiency can be achieved.

What I mean is that we adopted the system that one news information is edited and saved as "Full-Text", "150 letter", "45
letter” and “Headline”  Then, depending on the size and capacity of Terminal Unit, we determine the type and send news information. I did not talk about “45 letter type” or “headline type” but those are the ones used for headline news and for news-board on streets and on bullet trains.

System Support

Now I would like to touch on the technical aspects. In order to materialize our concept, our technical staff studied SGML. SGML is the Standard Generalized Mark-up Language for computer by classifying documents by element.

When we started to develop electronic newspaper, we found many papers and reports written in the U.S. on advantages to use SGML; however, none of Japanese newspaper companies were using SGML system. Also, in order to use SGML, DTD (Document Type Definition) is needed. This also did not exist in Japan.
Our technical staff, therefore, got together with members of editing and production departments, formed a project team and studied the way to describe articles with Mainichi Shinbun’s Morning and Evening Editions. After studying and discussing the matter for 6 months, they designed the format.

Cost (How much does it cost for editing electronic newspaper)

By the way, we don’t need to have a large scale system to edit electronic newspaper. Once newspaper articles are converted to text format for desktop personal computers, we can edit. And those personal computers can be purchased at 400,000 yen, which is approx. $2500 to $3000.

Software cost approximately 20,000 to 30,000 yen (a couple hundred dollars). We are using Access by Microsoft now, but at the beginning we were using Excel.
Subscribers of Electronic Newspaper

Electronic Newspaper is becoming popular and subscribers are increasing. Subscribers consider the electronic newspaper as a media between newspaper and TV.

There are approx. 10,000 subscribers for portable type and a few thousands for Full Text Type, and 25,000 for Mail Type. We have not experienced enormous increase in subscribers and we think it’s something to do with charge.

However, we are very hopeful that people will find it advantageous and they will subscribe.

Advertisement

We accept advertisers for Mail Type Electronic Newspaper, but not for Portable Type or Full Text Type. Mainichi Shinbun bears the cost of communication in the case of Mail Type but subscribers pay in the case of Portable Type and Full Text Type. Therefore, subscribers feel that downloading advertising they have
no interest is waste of money and time. There are requests, though, from Japanese companies who want to advertise on Portable Type and Full-Text Type and we are studying the possibility.

Future of Electronic Newspaper

In November of 1997, we started experimenting transmission of news with image. Taking pictures of news anchor persons using digital video recorder, we provide them to "Video Telephone" which is ISDN compatible developed by NTT. Persons who have Video Telephone system can dial a specific number and watch.

Our goal is to come up with "Ultimate Electronic Newspaper". "Ultimate Electronic Newspaper" is that subscribers can get news
with photos as well as images and voice at any time they want to obtain. Once we can transmit news information with images, we are one step closer to the "Ultimate Electronic Newspaper"

We are not exaggerating to say that developing and putting in practical use of "Portable Type", "Full-Text Type" "Mail Type" Electronic Newspapers and then transmission of news information with image are the steps we took to accomplish "Ultimate Electronic Newspaper".

There is no doubt that newspaper industry throughout the world will experience great changes of time. But our mission will remain the same as now, that is, to provide readers news information "fast and accurately". I strongly believe that when all human being including ourselves can obtain accurate news information instantly, there will be no unnecessary mistrust and conflict and peaceful and calm Multi Media World can be attained. I hope my presentation today helped even a little to reach the goal.

Thank you very much (for listening).
Bringing Internet To TV: War For The Eyeballs

Hatuhisa Takashima